



**Notícias no cenário midiático algorítmico: uma prática  
significante<sup>1</sup>**  
**News in the algorithmic media landscape: a signifying  
practice**

**Keywords:** News; Audiences; Signifying Practices.

**Introduction**

We have lately seen a migration of audiences from traditional news formats such as newspapers and TV news, to social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok), opening up the question of what news is and can be for the audience (c.f. Costera Meijer and Cormelink, 2015; AUTHOR, YYYY). This question is particularly important as we know from several studies that the notion of “newsness”, in the eyes of the audience, often differ substantially from that of the news industry (Edgerly and

Vraga 2020), that news, from the audiences’ perspective, today can be provided by varied content producers besides news journalism: government agencies and NGOs, influencers, bloggers and YouTubers, groups in social media, friends and family, and that particularly young audiences’ “information repertoires” are much broader than news journalism (Peters, et al. 2022). Such contemporary discussions open up for new

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approaches to news where news is no longer defined only by the news industry, but where audiences own perceptions of news must be taken into account. If we want to understand news, not only as a specific product, containing a certain kind of content, but rather as that which keeps people updated and informed about the world, we must accept that news can be anywhere, and be distributed in many different formats and styles. This means we, as Williams (1981: 14) early meant, in every specific historic cultural context need to analyse “specifically cultural institutions and formations, and the exploration of *actual relations between these* and, on the one hand, the material means of cultural production, and on the other hand, *actual cultural forms.*” (Italics added). In this paper hence, I approach news use from the perspective of young Swedish audiences, and the cultural form news takes in today’s digital landscape. The analysis builds on an interview study conducted in Sweden between October 2019 and January 2021 as part of a larger research project on news perceptions and practices among young adults (18-26 years old). For this analysis I am returning to the theoretical concept of *signifying practice* (Williams, 1981; Hall, 1997), emphasising not only the routinised dimensions of media practices, but also their role in meaning making. Culture is, according to Stuart Hall (1980) “itself a practice—a signifying practice—and had its own determinate product: meaning” (p. 18). Understanding news as a signifying practice emphasise not only the mundane and routine aspects of news, but also the meaning-making processes involved in news use, emphasising news also as text and content.

### **Analysis**

In this analysis I am arguing that the variety of social media that is used in the everyday lives of young Swedish adults mainly covers the same topics of information that traditional newspapers did, only spread out over several linked or separated social media



platforms. When putting together a map of the different things the young people said they wanted to stay informed about, it included:

- *Things that happen in my local area and/or affects me personally.*
- *What happens to friends and acquaintances.*
- *Public events in my local area.*
- *Entertainment.*
  
- *Sports.*
- *What other people think about current events.*
- *What happens in the world.*

These themes seemed very familiar, so follow up on this I compared with older studies of what people read and liked in the local newspaper, some 50 years ago. When comparing the interests of the young today with what young people in Sweden *actually read* in the local newspaper in the 1970s some striking similarities appeared. In the 1970s, Swedes between *15-24 years old* read the following parts of the paper (Weibull, 1983: 372):

- Entertainment (26%)
- Radio/TV (24%)
- Family news (15%)



- Sports (10%)
- News (9%)

One large difference though is that for many of these topics much better information is provided by sources *outside* news journalism, such as in social media groups, by sport clubs, event producers' web pages, etc. Local adds, "family news", sport updates, etc. are all more easily accessible outside of news journalism and the information provided by other sources is richer.

### **Conclusion**

The main argument I want to forward, based on the above analysis, is that young people in Sweden today are interested in, and keep updated about, mainly the same topics as young people did fifty years ago. What has changed, however, is how information is distributed, and that many of these issues are no longer covered by news journalism. Social media hence mainly fulfils the same informational needs for audiences that the traditional newspaper use to do, but many of the topics that was formerly covered by (local) newspapers) can no longer be found in journalism, or are much better covered elsewhere (such as family news, sport news, entertainment news, gossip, etc.). It is hence possible to (provocatively) suggest that it is not the audience that has abandoned news journalism, but news journalism that has abandoned the audience.



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